

MEDIA RELEASE

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Governor Proclaims September as Food Safety Education Month in Iowa

DES MOINES, IOWA – Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack has proclaimed September as National Food Safety Education Month in Iowa, noting that this is an “opportunity to reinforce proper food safety training and inform everyone of the simple steps they can take to prevent foodborne illness.” The theme of this year’s food safety awareness campaign is “Be Aware As You Prepare.”

Food Safety Education Month was created by the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation to heighten awareness of the importance of food safety education. Educational activities in Iowa are promoted and supported by the Iowa Food Safety Task Force, which is chaired by the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals (DIA).

“Ensuring safe food is an important public health priority for Iowa and our nation,” Governor Vilsack continued. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an estimated 76 million illnesses, 323,914 hospitalizations, and 5,194 deaths are attributed to foodborne illnesses in the United States each year.

“Especially since we are one of the nation’s leading food producers, it is appropriate for Iowa to be vigilant in taking responsibility for food safety,” Lt. Governor Sally Pederson added. “Iowans need to be assured that the food they consume, whether eaten at restaurants or prepared at home, is safe at every step from the farm to the dining table.”

The estimated cost of foodborne illness is between \$10 billion and \$83 billion annually. For some consumers, foodborne illness results only in mild, temporary discomfort or lost time from work or other daily activity. For others, especially pre-school age children, older adults, and those with impaired immune systems, foodborne illness may have serious or long-term consequences. The risk of foodborne illness is of increasing concern due to changes in the global market, aging of our population, increasing numbers of immunocompromised and immunosuppressed individuals, and changes in food production practices.

Food safety is a priority action area of *Healthy Iowans 2010*, the state’s comprehensive plan for disease prevention and health promotion in the new decade. Among the goals of *Healthy Iowans 2010* are four very specific food safety related objectives, which bear remembering during Food Safety Education Month.

The four food safety-related goals are:

- Reduce foodborne infections caused by major bacterial pathogens.
- Reduce the occurrences of foodborne illness-associated risk factors in retail food establishments.
- Increase the proportion of consumers who practice safe food-handling practices.
- Improve surveillance of foodborne diseases to ensure early recognition and prompt reporting to public health officials so that the cause of disease is determined in 90 percent of recognized cases.

“Food safety is an important responsibility that we all share for the health and well being of the public,” the Governor said. “The Iowa Food Safety Task Force is dedicated to encouraging all Iowans to practice safe food handling, preparation, and storage techniques. On behalf of the citizens of Iowa, I am pleased to join with the members of the Task Force in recognizing the contributions of restaurant and foodservice operations, hospitality associations, colleges and universities, federal, state and local government agencies, and consumer organizations in ensuring that food products provided to the consumer are safe and wholesome.”

“I am especially proud of the many dedicated food service workers and government employees who diligently protect the health and safety of Iowa consumers,” he added.

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Note to Editors: A series of five “*Be Aware When You Prepare*” fliers are available for downloading from the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals (DIA) web site at www.state.ia.us/government/dia/page9.html.